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FM AMCONSUL CALCUTTA

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1282
INFO RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 1149

RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI 0452

RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI 0454

RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA 0283

RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU 0283

RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 0219

RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO 0110

RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC

RHEFDHP/DIA DHP-1 WASHINGTON DC

RUEIDN/DNI WASHINGTON DC

RUEILB/NCTC WASHINGTON DC

RUEHCI/AMCONSUL CALCUTTA 1575

UNCLAS CALCUTTA 000533

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR SCA/INS AND INR
NEW DELHI FOR RSO

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: ASEC PGOV PTER IN

SUBJECT: BOMBS ON TRAIN IN W. BENGAL KILL AT LEAST SIX

REF: CALCUTTA 0509

¶1. (U) Summary: On November 20, an explosion on the Haldibari-New Jalpaiguri passenger train in northern West Bengal killed at least 6 and injured more than 50 people. Unofficial estimates indicate the death toll may rise to 15. No Americans have been reported injured. Although no one has claimed responsibility for the incident, suspicions revolve around the Kamtaupur Liberation Organization (KLO) and its "patron" the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA). End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) On November 20 two bombs exploded aboard a passenger train waiting to leave Belakoba station, a town in north Bengal. The train had been delayed by 20 minutes; otherwise the explosions would have occurred 18km away at New Jalpaiguri station, which is far more crowded than Belakoba. Initial media reports indicate that four other bombs on the train were located and defused. The West Bengal Police Inspector General (Law and Order) Raj Kanojia (please protect) told post that a high level team is investigating the blast, and that the "usual suspects" are being considered. A senior security official from Assam said he has no doubt that ULFA and the KLO are involved.

¶3. (U) Part of the Jalpaiguri district in northern West Bengal is a narrow, 21 kilometer corridor that connects Northeast India to the rest of the country. This area is reputed to be used by militants operating in the region as a transit point between India, Nepal, and Bangladesh. The KLO is a prominent insurgent group in northern West Bengal which demands a separate state for the Koch-Rajbongshi ethnic community. Koch-Rajbongshis also live in the Kokrajhar, Bongaigaon, Dhubri and Goalpara districts of lower Assam.

¶4. (U) The KLO has close links with ULFA. Intelligence sources believe that the KLO was supported by ULFA in 1995 to facilitate use of northern West Bengal as a transit point for insurgents crossing from Bhutan to Bangladesh. The KLO has maintained some hideouts for ULFA in northern West Bengal. By itself, the KLO is not a strong group (having only 100 cadres), but support from ULFA for training and equipment has enabled the KLO to carry out abductions, extortion and killing of local political leaders in northern West Bengal. KLO leader Jiban Singha reportedly lives in Bangladesh, as does ULFA Commander-in-Chief Pares Barua.

15. (U) Comment: The size of the bomb and apparent sophistication in the effort to time the explosion to occur in a train station for maximum casualties are surprising elements in this latest attack. In the past, KLO attacks typically would have specific targets, usually local politicians. These bombing, like the November 5 ULFA attacks (reftel), appear to have been seeking greater civilian casualties. Yesterday's attack also could be a reflection of the increased activity by ULFA following the breakdown in peace negotiations with the GOI.

By ratcheting up the violence, ULFA and its allies such as KLO may be able to pressure the GOI to seek negotiations with the insurgents.

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